

In order to select the Module 4 indicator that would have the most impact on my teaching and instruction for active learning using assessment during the writing block and beyond, I began by having a conversation with my mentor regarding the use of my current classroom assessments, highlighting both strengths and areas in need of improvement in my classroom. We discussed my pre-existing means of utilizing multiple measures to analyze student performance and inform subsequent planning and instruction during the writing block. We analyzed the assessments and feedback that I currently use to plan and drive my instruction in my first grade classroom. Through this conversation, it became apparent to me that although I relay general feedback to my students regarding their writing performance, there are many more ways with which I could provide students with specific, individualized feedback and assessment criteria to assist my students in improving their performance and assuming responsibility for their own learning and writing growth.

At present, the school district I work in requires teachers to use Lucy Calkins' writing rubrics to score each student's pre and post on-demand writing prompts at the start and conclusion of each writing unit. The rubric allows for scores in each skill set ranging from a Pre-Kindergarten level to a Grade 2 level, with half way marks between each grade. The rubric measures writing skills in the areas of Overall, Lead, Transitions, Ending, Organization, Elaboration, Craft, Spelling, and Punctuation. It gives examples of what writing at each grade level looks and sounds like in each category. After giving the Pre-on-demand writing assessment for my first unit of Narrative Writing, I scored the students' writing and used the rubric to assign each student a scaled score, indicating the grade level each student's writing matched. I used this data to form writing partners and guide some of my instruction. However, after doing some research on using assessment for learning, it was evident to me that I had to examine my current practices and use of assessments to find ways to improve upon my planning and instruction. It became clear that I needed to use both formative and summative assessments in specific and meaningful ways to provide opportunities for my students to self-monitor, set goals, and improve upon one skill at a time.

I began my new learning by working with my mentor to select a variety of resources that would support my growth and success across the continuum by learning to monitor student learning and adjust teaching during instruction. The first resource I utilized was the knowledge and understandings of experienced staff and teachers in my school. Because our entire elementary school conducts Writer's Workshop daily, I met with several teachers to discuss and interview them on their utilization of assessments in writing. We discussed all aspects of the rubric, ranging from how they score each student's writing piece to how they use the scores to inform their instruction and set realistic goals with their students. This experience gave me a chance to learn from experienced teachers who use assessments to adjust their instruction to meet the individual needs of their students, and I was able to take away many useful lessons for my own teaching as a result.

Another resource my mentor suggested for my new learning on this topic is the book *Classroom Assessment*, by W. James Popham (specifically pages 183-194). This book presents many different types of assessments that may be used in the classroom. It also provides information regarding many of the benefits and drawbacks of the different types,

as well as specific ways with which teachers can use these assessments to set goals with students and drive instruction. The chapter that I focused on for my growth in this area identified task-specific and hypergeneral rubrics as an insufficient means of supporting and driving instruction in the classroom. Popham describes skill-focused rubrics as “the type of rubric that really can illuminate a teacher’s instructional planning.” (p. 184) He goes on to state “those teachers who familiarize themselves with skill-focused rubrics in advance of instructional planning will usually plan better instruction than will teachers who aren’t familiar with a skill-focused rubric’s key features.” (p. 185)

Due to the fact that our school’s writing block is constructed around Lucy Calkins’ Common Core Writing curriculum, my other two resources utilized for new learning about the problem at hand came from two of the books that she wrote. My mentor and I selected chapter eight in *A Guide to the Common Core Workshop: Primary Grades*, by Lucy Calkins, for me to read and determine how to apply the lessons I learned to my writing instruction in my first grade class. This chapter explains how to differentiate feedback when conferring with individuals and small groups by breaking down each part into manageable segments. Calkins begins the chapter by sharing that “Research by John Hattie and others shows that one of the methods of teaching that accelerates a learner’s progress more than almost anything else is the provision of feedback. If learners receive feedback that contains both acknowledgement of what that learner has begun to do that really works and suggestions for next steps toward an ambitious but accessible goal, then learners progress in dramatic ways.” (p. 70) Therefore, much of the success of writer’s workshop relies on validating student’s strengths and motivating them to improve upon one area at a time. Reading and taking notes on this chapter’s overarching guidelines really aided my application of the specific lessons I carried out throughout the unit.

The second Lucy Calkins book I employed to guide my planning and instruction during the writing block was the book *If...Then...Curriculum: Assessment Based Instruction*, by L. Calkins, with Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. This book gives very specific and focused ideas and solutions to common errors that first graders make when writing in each genre. Calkins justifies why it is essential that teachers know how to confer well with students, and follows up with “If...Then” charts to specify how to make the most out of each conference with an individual students or small group of students. The CD that accompanies the Lucy Calkins Writer’s Workshop resource kit contains student examples, anchor charts, student checklists, and teacher rubrics. I have utilized these resources in both whole-group mini-lessons, as well as individual and small-group conferences.

When beginning our unit of narrative writing about “Small Moments”, I gave an on-demand pre-assessment, asking students to write a story about one time when they did something, giving as many details as possible. Through professional discussions with my mentor and experienced teachers that I interviewed, it became evident to me that I had to use each student’s narrative writing pre-assessment as a guide to plan instruction and small groupings based on areas most in need of improvement. The rubric identifies grade level standards of writing pertaining to structure, development, and language conventions that align with the Common Core. After asking students to compose a narrative piece

before the start of the unit, I scored each piece according to the rubric and organized my data according to which students needed the most improvement in each category. Doing this gave me insight as to which students to meet with to address the specific needs. For example, I had four students who scored at a Pre-Kindergarten level in the spelling category, indicating that they were not yet able to accurately use grade level words and spelling patterns throughout their paper. Because of this, I decided to pull these students aside during writing time for further instruction and guided practice in spelling. As a result, the spelling accuracy of these students increased significantly, making their pieces more fluid and easy to read. Using the specific data this rubric has provided me with, in addition to monitoring progress through observations, has helped me to adjust my instruction with more specific, distinguished goals for each student in mind.

Chapter eight of *Classroom Assessment* identifies common sources of error when scoring students' performance. It is important to account for all biases when scoring student work and attempt to be as realistic as possible. Assigning a score that is either too stringent or too lenient will not ensure maximum productivity when conferring and setting goals with students. Error types in scoring include scoring-instrument flaws, procedural flaws, and teachers' personal-bias errors. One way I have worked to minimize these errors in assessment scoring has been to engage in collaborative scoring with my first grade teammates and our literacy coach. We dedicated two of our Professional Learning Community meetings to analyze the rubric and calibrate the scoring of students' work. We scored many writing prompts together and discussed any confusion we had throughout the process. This served to unify our expectations and fostered collaborative planning for this unit of study in writing. As a first grade team, we are now able to share lesson and conference ideas and materials with confidence that we are meeting our students' individual needs at the appropriate levels. For example, I know that if a teammate is sharing strategies for teaching a group of students who have exhibited kindergarten-level beginnings to their stories, I am certain that her interpretation of the level matches my interpretation.

Another important lesson I learned from chapter eight of *Classroom Assessment* is the importance of focusing on a small number of truly significant skills, with the goal being skill mastery, not task mastery. It is imperative that students are learning the first grade writing skills needed and can apply them to all genres and writing tasks. I made each student a skill-based writing checklist with their name on it and had them laminated so they would be able to re-use them and get excited about using their white board markers and erasers. When my students use their checklists, they are checking off whether they have successfully demonstrated a writing skill or need to work on it. Even if they check off "Not Yet" in several areas, I stress the importance of only working on one skill at a time. I have learned that it may become very overwhelming for first graders to try to fix everything at once. Therefore, when my students are setting goals and self-assessing their writing, I instruct them to focus on improving only one area at a time. This has had a positive impact on the productivity of goal setting and using student checklists because the students are much less frustrated and have become more productive. During our Small Moment writing unit, a student of mine shared with me during a conference that he had checked off "Not Yet" in 3 areas of the rubric. I asked him which he wanted to work on first and why. He

chose to add detail and labels to his pictures, then work on a beginning and ending. Allowing him to decide which *one* area to focus on first gave him ownership and focus, resulting in a much higher quality story. My students have learned to thoroughly improve upon one skill before moving on to the next area in need of improvement.

*A Guide to the Common Core Workshop: Primary Grades* discusses the framework of a productive, differentiated writing conference. In chapter eight, Calkins breaks it down into four phases: "Research what the child is intending to do and has done. Decide what to teach and how to teach it. Teach using one of four methods, each of which usually ends in guided practice. Link by extrapolating from today's work whatever it is that the writer will want to carry forward into tomorrow's work." (p.73) After sending students off to write, the majority of the differentiated work and teaching can take place. In order to use assessments to provide individualized and descriptive feedback, I need the rest of the class to be able to work productively with independence. I learned that with better organization of materials and explicit teaching and modeling of how to problem solve without a teacher's assistance during writing time, students work more rigorously with greater independence. I observed an alphabet linking chart tapped to the writing folders of several students in another first grade classroom to assist them with the sounding out of the words they want to write. After seeing this I followed suit with several of my lower level students and English Language Learners that need that extra support to work more independently of the teacher. Additionally, I taught my class to "ask three before you ask me", and to be brave spellers instead of interrupting a conference. Stating clear expectations to my class and teaching then how to self-manage and problem solve has made conferences, partner work, and independent writing more productive for everyone. The students have responded very well to these rules and procedures because they now understand that when it is their turn to meet with the teacher, they would not want to be interrupted by their classmates. In previous units, I had several students that would constantly interrupt my conferences for minor questions, and I have now witnessed a substantial decrease in these types of interruptions. These small alterations to the structure of the writing block have had a significant impact on my class's ability to self-manage and make the most out of their time, while allowing my conferences to run more smoothly and be a more valuable use of time for everyone.

The book *If...Then...Curriculum: Assessment Based Instruction* has been a very useful tool for new learning. I use this book as a guide when planning many whole group, small group, and individual lessons. It has taught me that no matter what skill a first grade writer lacks or needs improvement on, there is a way to teach and reinforce that skill. Using my own rubric and the students' checklist, we worked together as a class to identify that an area we struggled with was end punctuation. Many students were not using any punctuation, and others were using it incorrectly. Lucy Calkins' book helped me learn how to address that issue. I then took this new learning and created writing stations. First, I taught a lesson to the whole class about how and when to use end punctuation. Then my students rotated around the room in four groups of 4-5 students and practiced this skill at their reading and writing level. They were provided with paragraphs at their individual levels to read and determine where to put end punctuation. One group at a time met with me for guided practice. At the end of their rotations, I administered an exit ticket as a quick

assessment to determine which students learned the skill and which needed further instruction or more practice. I use these assessments and the work completed in their stations to continuously inform, adjust, and differentiate instruction for individual student needs and provide students with an opportunity to learn from their performance. Since doing the lesson on end punctuation, I have many students who I now see rereading stories to check for proper placement of their end punctuation. I have seen an improvement in all students' writing, and a desire to improve in other areas as well.

Upon analyzing the results of the post-assessment given at the conclusion of our small moment writing unit, it is clear that my students have made a lot of progress throughout this unit. Prior to completing this module, only one of my nineteen students was writing on grade level based on their scaled score using the writing rubric. By using the pre-assessment and other assessments throughout the unit, as well as adjusting and monitoring my teaching during instruction, I was able to meet with individuals and small groups to address this deficit. My students have worked independently and with partners to assess their own writing and set goals for areas in need of improvement. Upon analyzing the results of the post-assessment data I was pleased to notice that ten students reached a scaled score matching that of a first grader, with several of my other students not far behind.

Through my research and the assistance of my mentor and co-teachers, I have learned a lot in regards to using multiple measures to analyze student performance and inform subsequent planning and instruction by providing students with assessment criteria and individualized, descriptive feedback. The knowledge I have learned through my research and the changes I have made in this area have greatly assisted my students in improving their performance and assuming responsibility for their own learning. I plan to continue to use what I have learned throughout future writing units and hope to see the same success that I did in the small moments writing unit.